

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 DHA-02 PPT-01 EUR-12

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 /066 W

----- 116377

O R 202120Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7938

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY BANGUI

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

AMCONSUL DOUALA

AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1947

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, CPRS, PINS, TO, DH

SUBJ: ALLEGED DETENTION OF US CITIZENS IN NORTHERN BENIN

REF LOME 2808

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE PROVIDES SUPPLEMENTARY INFO AND COMMENTARY RELATED TO ALLEGED DETENTION AND TORTURE OF THREE US CITIS AND ONE DUTCH CIT AT DJOUGOU IN NORTHERN BENIN. WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT AUTHENTICITY OF REPORT, AND ARE ALREADY PRESSING BENIN GOVT FOR INFO AND CONSULAR ACCESS. THIS MESSAGE IS ALSO AN URGENT APPEAL TO ADDRESSEES TO ASSIST EMBASSY IN OBTAINING INFO ABOUT THE TRAVELS AND/OR BUSINESS OF THE FOUR PERSONS CONCERNED. END SUMMARY

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1. FOLLOWING SUPPLEMENTARY INFO WAS OBTAINED BY TELECON THIS EVENING WITH EMBASSY LOME. THE CAR INFORMANT, WHO CARRIED NOTE FROM DJOUGOU TO LOME, HAD NOT BEEN TRAVELING WITH THE FOUR IN QUESTION. HE HAD BEEN ARRESTED SEPARATELY IN DJOUGOU, AND HAD RUN ACROSS THEM AT PLACE OF DETENTION. HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH PURPOSES OR ROUTES OF THEIR TRAVEL. NOTE, WRITTEN BY DOTSON, WAS CLEAR, AND MOST CERTAINLY THE PRODUCT OF A NATIVE SPEAKER OF ENGLISH. NOTE STATES THAT DOTSON IS DOCTOR, FENNEY IS REPORTER, RASKIN AND VAN DERBROEK ARE STUDENTS. PICTURE OF RASKIN IS ATTACHED TO NOTE. LOME EMBASSY WHO INTERVIEWED INFORMANT WAS OF OPINION LATTER WAS GIVING A TRUE ACCOUNT. AFTER TELLING HIS STORY, THE MAN TOOK OFF WITHOUT ASKING ANY FAVORS.

2. COMMENT: DJOUGOU IS ABOUT THREE HUNDRED MILES NORTH OF COTONOU, A GOOD DAY'S DRIVE. AS BACKGROUND FOR OST'S NOT PRIVY TO OUR RECENT POLITICAL REPORTING, THE PRB, WHERE ANY SEMBLANCE OF THE RULE OF LAW ENDED MORE THAN A YEAR AGO, HAS SINCE MID-OCT BEEN UNDERGOING STILL ANOTHER ROUND OF INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS. THE FOUR PERSONS WHO ARE THE SUBJECT OF REFTEL WERE PROBABLY SEIZED UNDER SUSPICION OF BEING "MERCENARIES" SENT HERE BY EXILE OPPOSITION GROUPS TO ASSASSINATE PRES KEREKOU AND OTHER EXTREMIST LEADERS OF THE PRESENT MILITARY REGIME.

3. THE STORY SEEMS PLAUSIBLE TO US. IT IS SIMILAR TO SO MANY OTHER, INVOLVING BOTH BENINOIS AND FOREIGNERS INCLUDING EUROPEANS. END COMMENT.

4. WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS. SINCE FORN-MINISTRY AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICE OFFICES ARE CLOSED UNTIL MONDAY (IT IS NOW SATURDAY EVENING IN COTONOU) DCM CALLED ON FORNMINISTRY PROTOCOL AND CONSULAR AFFAIRS DIR (TONOKOUIN) AT THIS HOME TO ENLIST HIS IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE IN CONTACTING DIR OF NATIONAL SECURITY POCIE (SURETE NATIONAL). PROTOCOL DIR DECLINED TO TAKE ACTION THIS EVENING, BUT ASKED DCM TO LEAVE THE MATTER IN HIS HANDS, HE WOULD OBTAIN NECESSARY INFO MONDAY MORNING DEC 22. DCM EXPRESSED APPRECIATION OF OFFER OF ASSISTANCE, BUT INDICATED ACTION REQUIRED AT ONCE AND COULD NOT WAIT UNTIL MONDAY. HE INFORMED TONOKOUIN THAT EMBASSY WOULD PURSUE CONFIDENTIAL

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EFFORTS TO CONTACT HEAD OF SURETE AND OTHER OFFICIALS ON OUR OWN, AND WOULD BE BACK IN TOUCH WITH HIM AT OPENING OF BUSINESS MONDAY (TONOKOUIN IS FRIENDLY TO US BUT TERRIFIED TO BE INVOLVED IN ANY MATTER THAT IS THE PROVINCE OF COMMUNIST INTERIOR MIN MARTIN DOHOU AZONHIHO). HAVING TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY LOCATE FORNMIN ALLADAYE (WHO MAY STILL BE ABROAD) WE CALLED HOME OF FORNMINISTRY DIRGEN, SINCE HE WAS OUT WE ASKED THAT HE CALL URGENTLY UPON HIS RETURN.

5. DCM HAS NOW SUCCEEDED IN REACHING THE DEPDIR OF SURETE NATIONAL (KOUKOU) BY TELEPHONE AT HIS HOME. LATTER DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE MATTER AND ASKED US TO CALL BACK MONDAY. DCM REPLIED THAT, IN VIEW OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE REPORT, FACT THAT THE PERSONS CONCERNED HAD ALLEGEDLY BEEN HELD ALREADY FOR MANY DAYS, AND WERE SAID TO BE ILL AND UNDERGOING TORTURE, WE EXPECTED IMMEDIATE ACTION. KOUKOU THE UNDER-TOOK TO ENDEAVOR TO REACH BNOUGOU BY GENDARERIE RADIO TOMORROW AND REQUEST INFO (IF HE REALLY HAS NO INFO AT THE MOMENT, WHICH WE CONSIDER VERY UNLIKELY IN THIS KIND OF MATTER, THAT IS THE BEST HE COULD DO. THERE ARE RADIO CALLS FROM COTONOU GENDARERIE HEADQUARTERS TO THE DISTRICT GENDARMERIE POSTS AT FIXED HOURS EACH DAY, BUT NO OTHER MEANS OF RAPID COMMUNICATION. THE RADIO CALLS GET THROUGH APPROXIMATELY THIRTY PERCENT OF THE TIME, WE UNDERSTAND). DCM INFORMED KOUKOU WE WOULD SEND A CONSULAR OFFICER TO DJOUGOU MONDAY TO SEE THE AMERICANS.

6. ACTION REQUESTED OF ALL ADDRESSEE POSTS IN AFRICAN, EXCEPT LOME: WOULD APPRECIATE MESSAGE FROM EACH OF YOU BEFORE COB MONDAY DECEMBER 22 INDICATING WHETHER YOU HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE OF ANY OF THE FOUR PERSONS, INCLUDING: PROFESSION, TRAVEL PLANS, OBJECTS OF TRAVEL, ANY PAPERS OTHER THAN PASSPORTS THEY MAY HAVE BEEN CARRYING. IF LAGOS, IBADAN, KADUNA OR NIAMEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH THEM, PLEASE INDICATE WHAT ROUTE THEY TOOK INTO BENIN, IF KNOWN. RECOMMEND USIS OFFICERS BE QUERIED WHETHER THEY KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT FEENEY.

7. FOR LOME: PLEASE DISCUSS CASE WITH OUR CONSUL, MONTGOMERY ROGERS (WHO AS YOU KNOW IS THERE FOR WEEKEND) AND GIVE HIM THE CAR INFORMANT'S NOTE, WITH RASKIN'S PICTURE.

8. FOR ABIDJAN: PLEASE INFORM DUTCH AMBASSADOR TO BENIN, WHO
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IS RESIDENT YOUR CAPITAL, BUT WITHOUT INDICATING THAT INFORMATION CAME OUT OF TOGO. YOU COULD SAY THAT WE HAVE TOLD SURETE THE REPORT INDICATED THAT A DUTCHMAN WAS IN THE GROUP ARRESTED, AND THAT WE WILL BE IN TOUCH WITH HONORARY DUTCH CONSUL HERE. SUGGEST YOU EMPHASIZE THAT WHILE WE ARE INVESTIGATING THE MATTER URGENTLY, WE STILL HAVE TO REGARD IT AS AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT.

9. FOR DEPARTMENT: PLEASE SEND US PERTINENT PASSPORT PARTICULARS OF THE THREE AMERICANS. WHILE SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL COULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE OBTAINED FROM THE AMERICANS' CONTACTS LISTED REFTTEL, CALLS TO THEM MIGHT WELL PROVOKE PREMATURE NEWS STORIES. A NASTY STORY THAT TURNED OUT TO BE UNTRUE WOULD BE VERY EMBARRASSING TO US HERE. THEREFORE BELIEVE YOU SHOULD HOLD OFF ON THAT UNTIL WE GIVE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN GOVERNMENT A REASONABLE CHANCE TO EXPLAIN THE MATTER OR ESTABLISH

THAT THE REPORT IS UNTRUE.

10. DEPARTMENT MAY REST ASSURED THAT WE ARE GOING TO PRESS
THIS MATTER RELENTLESSLY UNTIL IT IS CLARIFIED AND SETTLED.
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